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How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students

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Chapter 2. Types of Feedback and Their Purposes

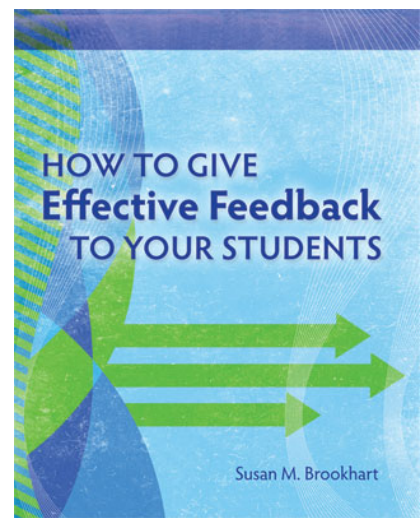
Chapter 1 identified the types of feedback strategies and content choices that research has found to be important for student achievement. This chapter illustrates these types of feedback with classroom examples. It is important to know what your choices are—what tools are in the box. Knowing what tools are available is the first step in choosing the right one for a specific student or learning target. Examples of both good and bad practices are given for each, with the exception of clarity, specificity, and tone. These "word choice" options are addressed in Chapter 3, which is specifically about the language you choose for feedback.

Choosing Feedback Strategies

As noted in Chapter 1, feedback strategies can vary in several dimensions: timing, amount, mode, and audience. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Timing

The purpose of giving immediate or only slightly delayed feedback is to help students hear it and use it. Feedback needs to come while students are still mindful of the topic, assignment, or performance in question. It needs to come while they still think of the learning goal as a learning goal—that is, something they are still striving for, not something they already did. It *especially* needs to come while they still have some reason to work on the learning target. Feedback about a topic they won't have to deal with again all year will strike students as pointless. A general principle for gauging the timing of feedback is to put yourself in the students' place. When would students want to hear your feedback? When they are still thinking about the work, of course. And when they can still do something about it. Figure 2.1 summarizes some examples of good and bad timing of feedback, and the following paragraphs elaborate on one example.



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Figure 2.1. Feedback Timing

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">For students to get feedback while they are still mindful of the learning targetFor students to get feedback while there is still time for them to act on it	
Examples of Good Amounts of Feedback	Examples of Bad Amounts of Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Returning a test or assignment the next dayGiving immediate oral responses to questions of factGiving immediate oral responses to student misconceptionsProviding flash cards (which give immediate right/wrong feedback) for studying facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Returning a test or assignment two weeks after it is completedIgnoring errors or misconceptions (thereby implying acceptance)Going over a test or assignment when the unit is over and there is no opportunity to show improvement

Good timing: Returning tests and assignments promptly. A teacher gave a multiple-choice test, scored it later that day, and returned the test to students the next day. After she handed back the scored tests, she spent class time going over the answers. In educational psychology terms, this is "knowledge of results." Even this simple feedback about the outcome is good—and is good to do promptly.

You may want to provide prompt feedback but feel too busy or overwhelmed to do so. A tip that works for some teachers is to make a special effort to catch up with feedback responsibilities. You can't be prompt with today's work if you still have last week's on your desk. But once you are caught up, you may find the pace is the same except that you are dealing with more recent work.

Bad timing: Delaying the return of tests and assignments. We can all remember those times in school when we thought, "Is she *ever* going to return that report?" I encourage you to recall those incidents and the accompanying feelings of frustration and of being ignored and use that energy to spur yourself to return your students' work promptly. It should be your regular practice to do that, and students should know it and be able to count on it. If students do experience regular, timely feedback, they will most likely be understanding if an emergency arises and you take longer than usual to return an assignment.

Amount

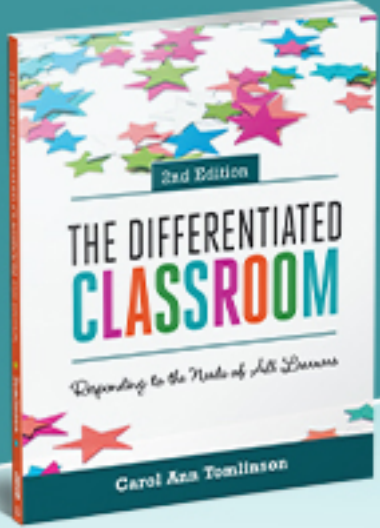
Probably the hardest decision to make about feedback is the amount to provide. A natural inclination is to want to "fix" everything you see. That's the teacher's-eye view, where the target is perfect achievement of all learning goals. For real learning, what makes the difference is a usable amount of information that connects with something students already know and takes them from that point to the next level. Judging the right amount of feedback to give—how much, on how many points—requires deep knowledge and consideration of the following:

- The topic in general and your learning target or targets in particular
- Typical developmental learning progressions for those topics or targets
- Your individual students

In addition, making a judgment about the amount of feedback requires considering all three simultaneously. Your feedback should give students a clear understanding of what to do next on a point or points that they can see they need to work on. This requires you to know your students; for some students, simply getting clarity and improvement on one point would be sufficient, whereas others can handle more. In order to know what *should* come next, dig into your knowledge of the topic (what else should they know?) and your teaching experience with the topic (what typically comes next?).

Try to see things from the student's-eye view. On which aspects of the learning target has the student done acceptable work? Which aspects of the learning target would the student benefit from improving upon next? Are any particular assignments coming up that would make it wiser to emphasize one point over another? Is there any particular point that you and the student have a history about? For example, if you and the student have been working hard on neatness, maybe a comment about handwriting would be right on target. If not, that comment may not be as useful as some of the other things you could say about the work, and you might

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choose to skip that and concentrate on something else. Figure 2.2 gives examples of good and bad choices about how much feedback to give, and the following paragraphs illustrate the point.

Figure 2.2. Amount of Feedback

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">For students to get enough feedback so that they understand what to do but not so much that the work has been done for them (differs case by case)For students to get feedback on "teachable moment" points but not an overwhelming number	
Examples of Good Amounts of Feedback	Examples of Bad Amounts of Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Selecting two or three main points about a paper for commentGiving feedback on important learning targetsCommenting on at least as many strengths as weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Returning a student's paper with every error in mechanics editedWriting comments on a paper that are more voluminous than the paper itselfWriting voluminous comments on poor-quality papers and almost nothing on good-quality papers

Good amount: Using the Goldilocks principle. The Goldilocks principle says, "Not too much, not too little, but just right." Appropriateness varies case by case, and here is just one illustration. The student work in Figure 2.3 is taken from the item bank for 4th grade writing of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The task is typical of the kind of in-class assignments many students do. Suppose you were this 4th grader's teacher and the student had written this paragraph for practice in class.

Figure 2.3. 4th Grade "Lunchtime" Paragraph

Writing prompt: Describe what lunchtime is like for you on a school day. Be sure to tell about your lunchtime so that someone who has never had lunch with you on a school day can understand where you have lunch and what lunchtime is like.

My lunchtime is loud, almost everybody in the lunchroom is making noise. We have very good food and nice cooks. We have 35 minutes to eat lunch. My lunch room is big and has a lot of tables. We have milk and a salad bar for the teachers that is what my lunchroom is about.

Source:

This paragraph is not optimal 4th grade work. However, the first and most important thing to point out is that the paragraph is clear and makes sense. That's true, and it's noteworthy. Probably the second main response to this as a piece of writing is that it is simple: it doesn't have much detail or variety in sentence structure. But if the student could think of how to add details, they would probably be included.

An initial feedback comment might be this:

This is clear and makes sense to me.

This comment describes the positive features of the work in relation to the learning goal: clarity and meaning in writing. The next bit of feedback might be this:

More details would make this more interesting. If you move the sentence about the lunchroom being big right after "noise," you give one reason for the noise. Can you think of others? Can you describe what the noise sounds like?

For some students, it would be advisable to stop here, with one positive comment and one suggestion for improvement. For students who are interested in further work on the goal of adding more details, the following comment would also help:

Can you give some examples of the "good food" besides milk and salad for the teachers? What kinds of food do you eat at lunch? What foods do your friends eat?

All of these comments are probably best delivered orally because, although they are simple, they take more words to make clear than the student has written. Even better, deliver these comments at the student's desk while pointing to the respective places in the paragraph. Once the paragraph is much better, the student can proofread it for spelling and other mechanics.

Even though this is an example about how much feedback to give, this is a good opportunity to point out some other features of these comments. Notice that the comments not only name the criticism (that the paragraph is very simple and lacks details) but also model strategies the student would use to add details, without telling the student what those details should be. They encourage the student to think, and they imply that those next steps are within the student's repertoire of experience and understanding.

Bad amount: Focusing only on mechanics. We all know teachers whose first inclination would be to use a contrasting-color pen (red, of course, is the favorite) and fix the mechanics. *Sald* should be *salad*. There should be a period after *teachers*. That sort of thing, although important, does not advance the student as a writer as much as the comments about the writing process.

Mode

Feedback can be delivered in many modalities. Some kinds of assignments lend themselves better to written feedback (for example, reviewing and writing comments on students' written work); some, to oral feedback (for example, observing and commenting as students do math problems as seatwork); and some, to demonstrations (for example, helping a kindergarten student hold a pencil correctly). Some of the best feedback can result from conversations *with* the student. For example, rather than telling the student all the things you notice about his or her work, you might start by asking questions such as these: "What are you noticing about this?" "Does anything surprise you?" Peter Johnston's book *Choice Words* (2004) has more discussion of how to ask questions that help students help you with feedback.

Decisions about whether to give the feedback orally or in written form should be partly based on the students' reading ability, especially for younger students. Could they understand what you would write? Such decisions are also partly based on opportunity. Talking with students is usually best, because you can have a conversation. However, you don't have the time to talk with every student about everything. Figure 2.4 presents examples of good and bad choices about the mode of presentation for feedback, and the following paragraphs provide further illustrations.

Figure 2.4. Feedback Mode

<div>Purpose:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">To communicate the feedback message in the most appropriate way</div>	
Examples of Good Feedback Mode	Examples of Bad Feedback Mode
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Using written feedback for comments that students need to be able to save and look overUsing oral feedback for students who don't read wellUsing oral feedback if there is more information to convey than students would want to readDemonstrating how to do something if the student needs to see how to do something or what something "looks like"</div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Speaking to students to save yourself the trouble of writingWriting to students who don't read well</div>

Good choice of mode: Taking advantage of a teachable moment. Recall that the feedback for the "Lunchtime" paragraph in Figure 2.3 formed the basis for a conversation with the student around two relatively simple points: the paragraph was clear, and more details were needed. These two comments are task-related feedback. Providing additional feedback about the process of getting details into the work would involve more words than the student wrote. Realistically, you can't write that much, and even if you did, it would have the effect, visually, of overwhelming the student work. Besides, this feedback could initiate a helpful, brief conversation with the student at a teachable moment. Therefore, providing the feedback orally is a good decision.

Bad choice of mode: Writing things the student can't comprehend. Unfortunately, the following example of a bad choice is a true story. An elementary teacher assigned her class to practice handwriting by copying a story from the board. A little boy with a mild learning disability was having difficulty transferring the story he was to copy from the board onto his paper. Using a bright purple marker, the teacher made a slash on his words each time a letter was added or omitted and wrote *addition* or *omission* over it. In one place, the student wrote *og* instead of *go*, and the teacher circled it and wrote *reversal*. The little boy did not know the words *omission* and *reversal*. All he was able to conclude from the purple slashes and strange words was that the teacher thought his paper was bad. He did not understand what he had done or how he might fix it. What he learned from that feedback was that he was weighed in the balance and found wanting. If that happens too often, students give up.

Audience

The example about the bad choice of mode also provides a lesson about audience. Like all communication, feedback works best when it has a strong and appropriate sense of the audience. Feedback about the specifics of individual work is best addressed to the individual student, in terms the student can understand. That simple act is powerful in itself because, in addition to the information provided, it communicates to the student a sense that you care about his or her individual progress. ("The teacher actually read and thought about what I did!") So the first point about audience is "Know whom you're talking to—and talk to them!"

If the same message would benefit a group of students, providing feedback to the class or group can save time and also serve as a minilesson or review session. If you speak to the whole class when only a subset needs the feedback, you can use the students who have mastered the concept as the "more experienced peers," helping you demonstrate the concept or skill. Or you can pull a group aside to give some feedback while others are doing something else.

You can also mix individual and group feedback. For example, imagine you had just collected a writing assignment in which you found many students had used bland or vague terms. You might choose to give the whole class some feedback about word choice, with examples of how to use specific, precise, or vivid words instead of dull and uninteresting ones. You might couple that with some thought-provoking questions on individual students' work: "What other words could you use instead of *big*? "How could you describe this event so someone else would see how terrible it was for you?"

Figure 2.5 presents examples of good and bad choices about the audience for feedback, and the following paragraphs elaborate the point.

Figure 2.5. Feedback Audience

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">To reach the appropriate students with specific feedbackTo communicate, through feedback, that student learning is valued	
Examples of Good Choice of Audience	Examples of Bad Choice of Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Communicating with an individual, giving information specific to the individual performanceGiving group or class feedback when the same mini-lesson or reteaching session is required for a number of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Using the same comments for all studentsNever giving individual feedback because it takes too much time

Good choice of audience: Using a group approach for a math demonstration. A middle school math teacher found that about a third of the class had trouble on a homework assignment. The problem concerned drawing perpendicular bisectors. Some students were trying to measure the line segment and divide it in half

instead of using a compass to draw circles around the endpoints and then connecting the points of intersection. The teacher decided that group feedback was in order, having seen the same kind of trouble on several papers.

First she told the class that she was going to go over constructing a perpendicular bisector because she had noticed that some people had had trouble with the homework and she wanted everyone to learn how to draw a perpendicular bisector. That comment did two things. First, it identified what she was going to do as *feedback*; students now knew that she was responding to their work. If the teacher had first launched into the demonstration without noting that it was feedback, many students would not have made the connection. The lesson would have just been "what we're doing today." Second, the comment reminded students of the learning target, making the feedback purposeful (in effect, saying, "We have a learning target, and here's what you need to do to get closer to it").

Next, the teacher drew a line segment labeled \overline{AB} on the board and asked, "What should I do first to draw a perpendicular bisector for line segment \overline{AB} ?" She called on a student who she knew had done it successfully to come to the board and demonstrate. As he did each step, she asked the class, "What is he doing now?" When that problem was done, she left it in view and drew another line segment labeled \overline{CD} next to it. She called on a student who had not been successful with the homework to come to the board and demonstrate, coaching as necessary so that he completed the task successfully.

Then she passed back the homework papers. Students who had perpendicular bisector problems marked incorrect were invited to do them again. Homework, after all, is for practice. By the time the chapter test rolled around, almost all the students showed that they did indeed know how to draw a perpendicular bisector.

Bad choice of audience: Math demonstration gone wrong. The scenario just described seems simple enough. But what if the teacher had found that only two of the students in the class were incorrectly measuring and then marking off half to bisect lines? The minilesson described would probably bore most of the class. Reteaching the whole class would be a bad choice of feedback audience in that case. The audience for additional feedback on bisecting lines— identifying measuring as an unproductive approach, providing reteaching and additional problems for practice—is those two students. Individual feedback would be the way to go. In traditionally organized classrooms, the teacher could provide that feedback in student conferences or during seatwork. Written feedback and examples on the students' homework papers followed by further opportunities to practice in class with the teacher or with peer tutors could also be helpful. In classrooms where flexible grouping and other differentiated instruction methods are used routinely, feedback could be given in the context of small-group work on bisecting lines.

Choosing Feedback Content

Choosing the content of your feedback involves choices about focus, comparison, function, and valence. Because any feedback message embodies choices about all of these things at once, the examples address all four factors together. This section will help you decide *what* to say in your feedback. For suggestions about *how* to say things (word choices that affect the clarity, specificity, and tone of your feedback), see Chapter 3.

Focus

Hattie and Timperley (2007) distinguish four levels of feedback:

- Feedback about the task
- Feedback about the processing of the task
- Feedback about self-regulation
- Feedback about the self as a person

Feedback about the task includes information about errors—whether something is correct or incorrect. Feedback about the task also includes information about the depth or quality of the work, often against criteria that are either explicit (for example, criteria from a scoring rubric) or implicit in the assignment (for example, a written assignment should be well written). Feedback about the task may include a need for more information (for example, "You should include more information about the First Continental Congress in this report"). Feedback about the task can also include information about neatness or format.

Feedback about the task has been found to be more powerful when it corrects misconceptions than when it alerts students to lack of information (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). If a student doesn't know something, further instruction is more powerful than feedback. One problem with feedback about the task is that it may not transfer to other tasks because it is specific to the particular assignment. In that sense, although it contributes to better learning for the task at hand, task feedback does not contribute to further learning as much as the second type, feedback about the process used to do the task.

Feedback about process gives students information about how they approached the task, information about the relationship between what they did and the quality of their performance, and information about possible

alternative strategies that would also be useful. Some successful learners are able to translate feedback about the task into feedback about the process. That is, given *outcome feedback* (knowledge of results), they can generate their own *cognitive feedback* (linking characteristics of the task and their process with those results)(Butler & Winne, 1995). In effect, when teachers give feedback about the process, they are scaffolding this kind of transfer for all students. This is a very powerful way to address the needs of all students, helping them to acquire this "learning how to learn" skill. (See Chapter 7 for more about this.)

Self-regulation is the process students use to monitor and control their own learning. Self-regulation can lead to students seeking, accepting, and acting on feedback information—or not. Effective learners create internal routines that include figuring out when they need more information, or an assessment or suggestions, and strategies for getting this feedback. Less effective learners depend more on external factors, such as whether the teacher decides to give any feedback on this or that assignment, for their information. Students are more willing to expend effort in getting and dealing with feedback if they have confidence in themselves as learners, called self-efficacy, and confidence that the information will be useful and thus worth the effort. Therefore, feedback about self-regulation is effective to the degree that it enhances self-efficacy.

Feedback about the person ("Smart girl!") is generally not a good idea, for two reasons. First, it doesn't contain information that can be used for further learning, so it's not formative. Second, and more insidious, feedback about the person can contribute to students believing that intelligence is fixed. This implies that achievement is something beyond the student's control. The belief that intelligence is fixed removes the connection between student effort and achievement (Dweck, 2007). It leads to a kind of academic fatalism. In contrast, feedback about the processes students use to do their work fosters the belief that achievement is related to specific strategies, specific kinds of effort that are under the student's control, and not to innate ability. This is not only better for learning—it's true! Figure 2.6 presents examples of good and bad choices about the focus of feedback.

Figure 2.6. Feedback Focus

<div>Purpose:<ul style="list-style-type: none">To describe specific qualities of the work in relation to the learning targetsTo make observations about students' learning processes and strategies that will help them figure out how to improveTo foster student self-efficacy by drawing connections between students' work and their mindful, intentional effortsTo avoid personal comments</div>	
Examples of Good Feedback Focus	Examples of Bad Feedback Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Making comments about the strengths and weaknesses of a performanceMaking comments about the work process you observed or recommendations about a work process or study strategy that would help improve the workMaking comments that position the student as the one who chooses to do the workAvoiding personal comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Making comments that bypass the student (e.g., "This is hard" instead of "You did a good job because ...")Making criticisms without offering any insights into how to improveMaking personal compliments or digs (e.g., "How could you do that?" or "You idiot!")

Feedback about processes shows students the connections between what they did and the results they got. Simple knowledge of test results is task-related feedback. To extend it into feedback about the learning process, have students figure out the reasons for the error for each item they got wrong. This simple exercise can be done individually. Help students see that careless errors (like marking the wrong choice even though they knew the right choice) imply that being more careful and taking more time might be good strategies for improvement. Errors about facts or concepts imply that studying longer or differently might be helpful. Trying to classify what kinds of facts or concepts were particularly problematic can help students "study smarter, not harder" by focusing on the trouble spots.

Students should also be able to indicate why the right answer is correct. This activity can be done in groups and is most useful if there are more opportunities ahead for the students to work with the material. It makes sense, in fact, to build in at least one more lesson or assignment after this kind of feedback, to provide a purpose for students' work and to send the message that it is possible, and important, to learn from

mistakes. Chapter 5 includes an extended example and a form for doing this.

Comparison

You may be accustomed to thinking about norm-referencing (comparing student performance to that of other students) and criterion-referencing (comparing student performance to a standard) in relation to test scores. Feedback also uses comparisons.

Comparing student work to a learning target is criterion-referencing, and it is the primary kind of comparison to use for good feedback. ("All your details support your thesis that sharks are misunderstood except this one. I don't see what it has to do with sharks.") This feedback helps the *student* decide what the next goal should be. Feedback against clear criteria matches with the model of instruction used in most classrooms. Most teachers use an instructional model that starts with a learning target (sometimes called a goal or an objective). What does the target look like? How will the students know how close they get? How close did they, in fact, get on this assignment? These are the questions that criterion-referenced feedback answers, and they are the questions students need to have answered in order to learn.

Self-referenced feedback is helpful for describing the processes or methods students use. ("I see you checked your work this time. Your computations were better than last time too! See how well that works?") Self-referenced feedback about the work itself is also helpful for struggling students who need to understand they can make progress. ("Did you notice you have all the names capitalized this time? You had trouble with that last time.") Chapter 7 considers this use in more detail.

Just for the sake of completeness, I'll define norm-referenced feedback. Such feedback is not generally recommended, because it doesn't contain information the student can use to improve. Norm-referencing compares a student's performance to the performance of other students. Suppose, for example, Trisha's paper was judged to be not as good as her neighbor's. If she had the chance to do it over, what would she do? Other than copy her neighbor's paper, she really doesn't have anything to go on. Even worse, norm-referenced feedback creates winners and losers and plays into that fatalistic mind-set that says student ability, not strategic work, is what's important.

Given the competitiveness that is trained into many students in the United States, sometimes students want norm-referenced information. In the context of *summative assessment only*, not formative assessment, I have seen teachers give limited norm-referenced information as a way of helping students answer the question "How did I do?" For instance, when handing back a graded assignment, a teacher may put the grade distribution on the board (7 *As*, 10 *Bs*, and so on) so that students can see where they are. This approach can be useful in a class where you are sure all the students are successful learners. As with all feedback, understanding the context is absolutely crucial. Norm-referencing is so dangerous to the motivation of unsuccessful learners—or those who feel that way, whether they are or not—that I don't recommend it. And the research doesn't either. Figure 2.7 presents examples of good and bad choices about the kinds of comparisons used in feedback.

Figure 2.7. Kinds of Comparisons Used in Feedback

<div>Purpose:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Usually, to compare student work with established criteriaSometimes, to compare a student's work with his or her own past performanceRarely, to compare a student's work with the work of other students</div>	
Examples of Good Kinds of Comparisons	Examples of Bad Kinds of Comparisons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Comparing work to student-generated rubricsComparing student work to rubrics that have been shared ahead of timeEncouraging a reluctant student who has improved, even though the work is not yet good	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Putting up wall charts that compare students with one anotherGiving feedback on each student's work according to different criteria or no criteria

Function

If only using "descriptive" versus "evaluative" feedback were simply a matter of wordsmithing! We could all learn how to write descriptive feedback just as we learned to write descriptive paragraphs in elementary

school. Unfortunately, part of the issue is how the student understands the comment. Students filter what they hear through their own past experiences, good and bad.

Students are less likely to pay attention to descriptive feedback if it is accompanied by judgments, such as a grade or an evaluative comment. Some students will even hear "judgment" when you intended description. Some unsuccessful learners have been so frustrated by their school experiences that they might see even an attempt to help them as just another declaration that they are "stupid." For these learners, it helps to point out improvements over their own last performance, even if those improvements don't amount to success on the assignment. Then select one or two small, doable next steps for the student; after the next round of work, give feedback on the success with those steps, and so on.

However, there are some things you can do to maximize the chances that students will interpret the feedback you give as descriptive. First, give students lots of opportunities to practice and receive feedback without a grade being involved. Some teachers find this hard to do. (Have you ever said, "Everything you do counts in my class"?) However, it doesn't make sense to have students always work on learning targets that are easy enough that they can get an *A* or a *B* the first time they try it. It will take a while, but if you work at it, you can shift what students see as "counting." If they attempt moderately challenging work, are exposed to feedback that they can see makes their work better, are allowed to practice until they improve, and *then* do a test or an assignment "for a grade," most will learn that they benefit. These student feelings of control over their work and self-regulation will dwarf any kind of "control" you engineered by grading everything. If your students need some scaffolding as they develop these kinds of work habits, you might have to work up to it. In the end, though, feedback without the opportunity to use it to improve really is pointless.

Second, make your feedback observational. Describe what you see. How close is it to the learning target? What do you think would help?

Figure 2.8 presents some examples of good and bad choices about whether feedback is descriptive or evaluative.

Figure 2.8. Feedback Function

Purpose (for Formative Assessment): <ul style="list-style-type: none">To describe student workTo avoid evaluating or "judging" student work in a way that would stop students from trying to improve	
Examples of Good Feedback Function	Examples of Bad Feedback Function
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identifying for students the strengths and weaknesses in the workExpressing what you observe in the work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Putting a grade on work intended for practice or formative purposesTelling students the work is "good" or "bad"Giving rewards or punishmentsGiving general praise or general criticism

Valence

Feedback should be positive. Being "positive" doesn't mean being artificially happy or saying work is good when it isn't. Being positive means describing how the strengths in a student's work match the criteria for good work and how those strengths show what the student is learning. Being positive means pointing out where improvement is needed and suggesting things the student could do about it. Just noticing what is wrong without offering suggestions to make it right is not helpful. Figure 2.9 presents examples of good and bad choices about the valence (positive or negative) of feedback.

Figure 2.9. Feedback Valence

Purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none">To use positive comments that describe what is well doneTo make suggestions about what could be done for improvement

Examples of Good Feedback Valence	Examples of Bad Feedback Valence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Being positive▪ Even when criticizing, being constructive▪ Making suggestions (not prescriptions or pronouncements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Finding fault▪ Describing what is wrong and offering no suggestions about what to do▪ Punishing or denigrating students for poor work

Tunstall and Gipps (1996) developed a typology of teacher feedback based on observations in primary schools. They divided feedback into two main kinds: descriptive and evaluative. Positive evaluative feedback includes rewards, general praise, and the like. Negative evaluative feedback includes punishments, general criticisms, and so on. On the descriptive side, however, all of the feedback has a positive intention. Even criticism, if it is descriptive and not judgmental, is intended to be constructive. Tunstall and Gipps talk about descriptive feedback as being composed of "achievement feedback" and "improvement feedback." Achievement feedback describes or affirms for a student what was done well and why. Improvement feedback describes for a student what more might be done and what strategies might lead to improvement of the work.

Examples of the kinds of comments a teacher might make are presented in Figure 2.10, along with comments about their focus, kind of comparison, function, and valence. The comments are also listed as examples of "good feedback" and "bad feedback," but keep in mind that the context makes a difference. The examples of "bad feedback" are almost never appropriate, but without context, that's as much as we can say about the chart. Even the examples of "good feedback" wouldn't be appropriate for students who didn't need to hear them.

Figure 2.10. Examples of Feedback Content

Feedback	Types of Focus, Comparison, Function, and Valence
<i>Each paragraph should have one main idea, and that idea goes in the topic sentence.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focus—Task▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced▪ Function—Descriptive▪ Valence—Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback if the student needs this information about what paragraphs should contain.</p>
<i>Your details strongly support your claim that we should recycle newspapers. That's great. Where did you find all those facts?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focus—Task, process, self-regulation▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced▪ Function—Descriptive▪ Valence—Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback. It confirms for the student that the work meets one of the targets (strong supporting details) and connects this success to student effort (the student did research to find out facts, and the teacher noticed).</p>
<i>This report probably wouldn't convince a reader who didn't already agree we should recycle. What else could you do to make a more convincing argument?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focus—Task, process▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced▪ Function—Descriptive, naming weakness in terms of criteria and suggesting the student think about improvement strategies▪ Valence—Critical, but pointing forward <p>This is an example of good feedback for a student who the teacher believes already knows what to do (look up more information in more sources). Such a response makes the student the one to decide on the regulation. It would not be good feedback if the teacher truly did not</p>

	think the student knew what was missing.
<i>This report probably wouldn't convince a reader who didn't already agree we should recycle. I would want to know more about the effects on the environment and the cost of recycling.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus—Task, process ▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced ▪ Function—Descriptive, naming weakness in terms of criteria and suggesting improvement strategies ▪ Valence—Constructive criticism <p>This is an example of good feedback for a student who the teacher believes does not know what is missing in his or her report. It suggests what the student could do to improve the report.</p>
<i>Your report was the shortest one in the class. You didn't put enough in it.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus—Task, process, personal ▪ Comparison—Norm-referenced ▪ Function—Judgmental ▪ Valence—Negative <p>This is an example of bad feedback. The teacher aims to communicate the same feedback message as in the previous box. Saying it this way, however, implies that the student is competing with others (as opposed to aiming for a learning target) and that the reason the work is poor is that the student "did something bad." The student ends up feeling judged and not motivated to improve.</p>
<i>This report is better than your last one. You've made it clear you think we should recycle newspapers. What would make it even better is more facts about what would happen if we did recycle—more about how many trees we would save, things like that.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus—Task, process ▪ Comparison—Self-referenced ▪ Function—Descriptive ▪ Valence—Positive, plus constructive criticism <p>This is an example of good feedback that uses self-referenced comparisons in conjunction with descriptive information about the task to show struggling students that their work is making a difference. Then, when the teacher suggests what they need to do next, they may be more likely to think they can do it. Notice too that the teacher makes one suggestion (and probably also made one last time: it's important to be clear about the main point). Giving feedback about small steps helps students who would be overwhelmed by having to improve in many areas at once.</p>
<i>Your report is the best one in the class! You can have a "free pass" for your homework tonight.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus—Personal (it says the report is great, but the attribution seems to be that this is a "good" student) ▪ Comparison—Norm-referenced ▪ Function—Judgmental ▪ Valence—Positive <p>This is an example of bad feedback. It does not tell the student what is good about the report. It also rewards the student by changing an unrelated assignment.</p>
<i>I love the chart that starts with trees and ends up at the recycling plant (instead of back at more trees). It follows the relevant section of your report and illustrates the complete cycle so clearly! How did you come up with that idea?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus—Task, process, self-regulation ▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced ▪ Function—Descriptive ▪ Valence—Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback that does what the previous example may have intended to do. It selects an unusual, positive feature of a good report, notices that this must have been an original idea, and asks the student to reflect on how he or she came up with the</p>

	idea. Having the student name the strategy used will strengthen this student's self-regulation abilities and probably increase self-efficacy.
<i>Your report is late! What's the matter with you?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focus—Personal▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced (implied—being on time)▪ Function—Judgmental▪ Valence—Negative <p>This is an example of bad feedback. Of course there is a problem if work is late. However, put yourself in the student's position. Would this comment really inspire you to finish your work and turn it in?</p>
<i>[Name], I don't have your report. Can you tell me what happened?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focus—Process▪ Comparison—Criterion-referenced (implied—being on time)▪ Function—Descriptive▪ Valence—Open at this point, soliciting information <p>This is a better example than the previous one of feedback to deliver the message that work is late.</p>

How to Know Whether Your Feedback Is Good

The examples in Figure 2.10 show how choices about feedback content affect the message that is sent and therefore how the student will probably respond. Student response is the criterion against which you can evaluate your own feedback. Your feedback is good if it gets the following results:

- Your students do learn—their work does improve.
- Your students become more motivated—they believe they can learn, they want to learn, and they take more control over their own learning.
- Your classroom becomes a place where feedback, including constructive criticism, is valued and viewed as productive.

Focus, comparison, function, and valence are choices about *what* to say in your feedback. You also have choices about *how* you say things—about clarity, specificity, and tone. Chapter 3 discusses these types of choices.

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Seif_Eddine_Bououden 10 months ago

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